A Brief Analysis of the Strategies for Popularizing Kickboxing Events in China—A Case Study of EM-Legend

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Abstract. Based on kicking and punching, kickboxing is practiced for self-defense, general fitness, or as contact sport. With low public attention, most kickboxing events in China are now paid by sponsors. By means of literature review and logical analysis, this paper focuses on EM-Legend to examine the status quo of kickboxing events in China; then it tries to explore the social factors which affect the popularization of kickboxing events, and provides some strategies for popularizing this event. The strategies are as follows: de-administration of kickboxing events; cultivation of top brands and star fighters; combination of kickboxing with traditional Chinese martial arts.

Introduction

When talking about sports that developed fastest in recent years, kickboxing is indispensable. Since 2014, a great number of kickboxing events have been held all over China and more than a thousand of them get on the stage, for example, EM-Legend broadcasted by Sichuan Television Station (SCTV), WLF broadcasted by Henan Television Station, Kunlun Fight broadcasted by Jiangsu Television Station, etc. From the perspective of quantity, kickboxing industry is in the process of vigorous development. However, it is not going smoothly in reality. Because of insufficient profit-making pattern, lack of excellent fighters, and low public attention to combat sports, kickboxing events are unsatisfactory in quality although they are explosive in number. As a result, some events appear abruptly and disappear silently in a short time. It caused an embarrassing situation that kickboxing events change frequently.

Notably, there are different forms of kickboxing events like social kickboxing games, small-scale kickboxing shows, kickboxing TV shows, and national kickboxing competitions. Among all these forms, kickboxing TV shows are in the highest status because of their high dissemination and wide audience. EM-Legend is a kickboxing program broadcasted every Tuesday night by SCTV since 2016. It is a typical kickboxing TV show and the author has regularly worked for it over a year, so this paper takes EM-Legend as an example to examine the status quo of kickboxing events in China and provides some strategies to popularize it.

1 Status Quo of Kickboxing Events in China

Nowadays, in China, kickboxing event has entered the socialist market economy as an independent event. Therefore, in view of its operation, it could be discussed from the following three parts.
1.1 Form of Organization

The nature of the event and the form of the event’s organization determines its purpose and its future development. Under the tide of the development of socialist market economy in China, how to adapt to the market while considering the characteristics and conditions of China will be the necessary conditions for the successful hosting of sports event. China pays high attention to kickboxing event because it is in the initial stage of development. Thus, most provinces have a positive attitude towards this event.

When it comes to forms of organization, fighters who join the game of EM-Legend, whether foreign or Chinese, are selected from professional kickboxing clubs. There are seventeen clubs cooperating with EM-Legend now. Each professional club is an independent organization and has its own corporate sponsorship; meanwhile, each club is responsible for its own organization and management, such as the selection of athletes, training, marketing and so on. Up to now, there are eighteen games of EM-Legend played in different cities of Sichuan with local governments’ support.

1.2 Marketing and Financing

Without financial support, the event cannot be held smoothly and sustainable. With the development of sports industry, profit has became an indispensable issue that any committee would concern. In highly developed market economy, market resources can be divided into dozens of sorts, which includes the event ontology resources, event carrier resources, media resources and derivative resources. The development of China's sports market resources, especially those of the kickboxing events, is ceasing to advance. For EM-Legend, there is only a few millions RMB provided every year by sponsors. But there is thousands by thousands cost every month, and the revenue is not enough to cover the cost. In another word, EM-Legend cannot receive a sensible income according to the sponsorship and easy to break up without the capital from them. Over a year, EM-Legend tries its best to establish cooperation with more clubs and to find more sponsors, but things do not go well. It is not easy to get financial support, and EM-Legend still has a long way to go if it strives for a long-term development.

China’s kickboxing events are now mainly financed by government or companies that cooperate with government, because government can provide all conditions to the event’s operation. So only a little amount of fund and resources could guarantee a great success of this event. However, the future of kickboxing events which only rely on government is not bright, because the power of competition management should be handed over to the market. Besides, the government's long-term support for kickboxing will waste a lot of money; as the event expands, the government will face a dilemma. If the government stop supporting the event, the event will face shortage of fund; if the government continues supporting the event, the government will face a huge amount of expenditure. Therefore, what the government should do now is to help developing market resources of kickboxing events to build a benign operating system.

1.3 Promotions

Promotion is mainly divided into packaging and marketing. If the event has been successfully packaged and reasonably marketed, then that event will be more than just a sport event, but also a huge media carrier and entertainment platform; meanwhile the event will contain unlimited potential opportunities of making money. But for kickboxing events now, it is not easy to promote event with limited finance.
With the principle of creating a sport card for the hosting city and the development strategy of “sports plus tourism”, EM-Legend was fully promoted by SCTV. But the lack of after-game propaganda makes it hard to attract more potential attention to this event. The packaging of the event is omnidirectional and multi dimensioned; sports events which have no related TV programs or activities after the game could hardly satisfy the audience. For kickboxing event which is highly competitive, pregame publicity campaign and postgame activities will make the game more exciting.

It is difficult to get profit from tickets. Besides, TV broadcasting right in China is different from that in Europe and America. EM-Legend cannot obtain huge profits by broadcasting right; coupled with the ineffectiveness of the fighting star as well as the lack of the campaign publicity; it is very difficult to achieve the ideal goal of kickboxing events marketing in China.

2 Social Factors that Affect the Popularization of Kickboxing Events in China

At present, kickboxing events are facing difficulty in popularizing; the main causes are the shortage of finance and promotion mentioned before. So, there must be some Chinese special factors that affect its popularization.

2.1 The Whole Nation System

The whole nation system is a kind of sports management mode of China, which is based on China’s special national conditions in the 1950s. In the 1960s, China encountered three years’ natural disasters and a ten years’ Cultural Revolution. At that time, most Chinese people only cared about how to keep alive, but the whole nation system helped China form a highly centralized administrative management, and then promoted China quickly to be a major sporting power.

However, with China's entry into the market economy, the situation of the whole nation system and the market economy become disharmonious. The sports management department became highly concentrated so that the State Sports Commission controls all parts of sports, and thus social sports organizations gradually lose their sports management function. The highly concentrated management eventually caused loss of people’s enthusiasm in sports investment.

In the whole nation system, development of kickboxing is seriously hindered. After more than 30 years of Reform and Opening Up, China's social system finally shows a characteristic of diversification, and then kickboxing rise abruptly but its technical skill is still far behind other countries. According to a statistic, there are more than one thousand kickboxing events appeared in 2014; the number is only less than that of marathon events. But many kickboxing events realized it is hard to find a suitable profitable operating model to adapt to the sport system. The whole nation system makes China's kickboxing event lag far behind, which has a tremendous impact on it.

2.2 Propagation Control

Nowadays, competitive sports can not only carry the spirit of the people and the value of the country, but also reflect the economic and technological strength of the country or the city. Therefore, far beyond the sport itself, it has become an important component of the image of the hosting country. Thus more countries or cities start using the event, especially international sports event, to fully display their city images. With mass media, sports events can spread quickly; meanwhile, sports contain rich human connotation by means of mass media, and the sport’s
broadcasting could affect and even shape a city and even a country's image. Therefore, sports events will be screened and filtered before mass media broadcast them.

When people are watching kickboxing events, it is unavoidable to see violent scenes like limb collision, cuff and kick, split brow, and arm dislocation. On the other hand, in the break of each round, there is often a sexy ring girl who shows to remind which round is going to start, and the difference between the male and female body in this minute is shown without reservation. But owing to propagation control practice in China, the two most attractive elements, violence and sexuality, are not suitable for television to play; thus in the play of EM-Legend, some segments of blood flying and fighter’s tattoo have been cut and ring girls have been demanded to wear conservative dresses. It makes the event less attractive. As a result, EM-Legend was beaten in the ratings on Sichuan channel by other kind of programs.

2.3 Principle of “a Proper Attack to Opponent for Skill Exchange” in Chinese Values

The thinking mode of the Chinese is the unity of heaven and man, which pays special attention to the study of the organic unity of the universe, the natural harmony, the endless and the integrated whole. Based on this thinking mode, Chinese people focus more on unifying virtual and real, dynamic and static, Yin and Yang, and thus pursue psychological balance in the process of routine exercise. In Chinese value, harmony is the most important thing; a man needs to get respect from his opponent from the bottom of his opponent’s heart and then obtains peace between the two. While in western country, people always win others’ respect through power. They have open minds; focus on body building, pursue freedom and only care about themselves. Kickboxing is a typical highly competitive sport originated from Japan. In the process of fighting, fighters are prone to initiative attack and self-defense, never bow and never give up. Fighters use the sport spirit as the pillar and soul to conquer their opponents, to knock out them, and to obtain personal victory. Since China has decided to popularize kickboxing, the sport encountered typical static culture in China. The principle of conquer encountered the principle of a proper attack to opponent for skill exchange, thus popularization of kickboxing in China is indeed in a trudge.

3 Strategies for Popularizing Kickboxing Events in China

There are both advantages and disadvantages to popularizing kickboxing in China. On the one hand, Chinese people prefer to live peacefully and to cultivate themselves, both mentally and physically. Thus the public’s values are incompatible with kickboxing. On the other hand, China manages almost all sports under the mode of the whole nation system. It is also in charge of those sports’ propagating. Thus kickboxing is hard to attract public attention. While the advantage is that government supports the development of kickboxing strongly and provides rich resources, meanwhile more entrepreneurs focus on sports event and are willing to invest. On this basis, the author provides the following three pieces of advice.

3.1 De-Administration of Kickboxing Events

In China, the excessive interference of administrative power in sports has hindered the development of some sports; de-administration has become a hot word discussed by sports-lover. Taken Chinese football as an example, Chinese Football Association and the Chinese Football Management Center are managed by the same group of people; it is one of the main causes of the corruption in football. Compared with football, kickboxing just appears on the stage. It is difficult to
say whether kickboxing professionalism will face the same problem as football. Therefore, to adjust and reform the construction of kickboxing event before it fully formed is beneficial to the future development of Chinese kickboxing. Thus, the fundamental trend of the whole nation system is to innovate sports system design, to reform the assessment system of gold first, to enhance the cultural quality of fighter, and to build a new socialized competitive system that supported by both government and enterprise. It can be predicted that when kickboxing become more famous, the community is keen on it and willing to achieve fair play; meanwhile entrepreneurs will also be willing to invest in kickboxing. Thus the whole nation system will disappear naturally, and kickboxing event achieves its goal of commercialism.

3.2 Cultivation of Top Brands and Star Fighters

Sport is also facing the impact of competition after entering the market. But why companies like Coca-Cola and McDonald's never fail? The power of brand is inestimable. In China, some sports brands have already been accepted by people, such as Lining, Anta and other sports products manufacturers, and sports events like CTTSI (China Table Tennis Super League) and WVL (Women's Volleyball League) are also accepted by the public. The development of kickboxing event in China is still in the early stage, but there also emerged some good events like Kunlun Fight, WLF, etc. There is no high expectation on Chinese kickboxing events to be famous worldwide in a short time, but for kickboxing itself, the way towards the direction of branding and commercialization is a right path. By means of branding and commercialization, kickboxing events could obtain high profits, reduce the cost of publicity, and win trust from the sponsors. Like Yao Ming, stars’ success is not only a simply personal behavior but a fully support provided by the government and society. The stars’ spirit is incomparable, and the influence of star fighters will definitely promote the development of kickboxing, and promote kickboxing industry.

3.3 Combination of Kickboxing with Traditional Chinese Martial Arts

On the one hand, after the Beijing Olympic Games, China has become a sporting power. As a representative of the traditional Chinese sports, traditional Chinese martial arts bear the important task of shaping the image of a powerful country of sports. Therefore, promoting the status of traditional Chinese martial arts is important to China. On the other hand, traditional Chinese martial arts is famous overseas, and has become a cultural symbol of China; most foreigners still have the impression of ancient Chinese civilization like Kong Fu and Confucius, but they think traditional Chinese martial arts is too profound to touch. In a nutshell, to combine kickboxing with traditional Chinese martial arts could not only attract more talent foreign fighters come to China to promote traditional Chinese martial arts overseas, but also provide China’s kickboxing event the chance of obtaining more social attention and resources, thus achieves a win-win outcome of promoting both kickboxing and traditional Chinese martial arts.

Summary

Due to the profound impact of Chinese sports system and culture, the development of kickboxing events in China is not smooth. Chinese people, affected by Confucianism, prefer peace and focus more on self-cultivation of mind and body. Thus they are not keen on kickboxing which is rather violent. However, as an independent sports event in China, the development of kickboxing events is rich in market resources and strongly supported by the government. It is truly possible to grow vigorously in China. Therefore, de-administration of kickboxing events, cultivation of top brands
and star fighters, and combination of kickboxing with traditional Chinese martial arts will be propitious for the popularization of kickboxing events in China.

**References**


